

VZCZCXRO3604
OO RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHFR #2023/01 3101432
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 051432Z NOV 08
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4747
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 002023

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/5/2008
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [EUN](#) [FR](#) [EG](#) [CZ](#) [IS](#) [AG](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: MEDITERRANEAN UNION MINISTERIAL ENDS UP A SUCCESS
BY AVERTING FAILURE

REF: A. PARIS POINTS 11/4/2008
[1](#)B. PARIS 2005 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Political Counselor Andrew Young for reasons 1.4. (b), (d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) The Marseille ministerial on the Union for the Mediterranean concluded November 4 amid wrangling over organizational details to include in the final declaration continuing well past the allotted time for the working plenary session. French FM Kouchner and Egyptian FM Abu al-Ghayt, however, presided over a press conference that underscored agreement on several key points:

--The final declaration states that the Arab League "shall participate in all meetings at all levels" of the UPM. Abu al-Ghayt was emphatic on this point in the press conference when pressed by reporters. Word among journalists and diplomats was that the Israelis had compromised on this demand in exchange for obtaining one of the newly created assistant secretary general positions.

--Although the ministers did not announce who would assume the post of UPM secretary general, they did announce the creation of five assistant, or deputy, secretary general positions with three coming from the northern side of the Mediterranean (i.e., the EU) and two from the southern side. The first five, who would receive unspecified functional portfolios and serve on an unspecified "rotational basis," would come from the Palestinian Authority, Greece, Israel, Italy, and Malta. One of the last-minute wrangles reportedly involved Turkey's insistence, after otherwise receiving nothing for its participation in the UPM, on one of the ASYG slots or on the creation of a sixth one. Kouchner made repeated reference to the need to review this proposal and decide what to do over the next 1 1/2 to 3 months (the timeframe for drawing up a formal statute for the UPM secretariat). His comments to reporters after the formal press conference and after Abu al-Ghayt's departure suggested the understanding on Arab League participation might need to be reviewed (a view not shared by most of our contacts, who believed the Arab League issue was well and truly resolved despite Algerian and other Arab unhappiness that Israel got one of the southern ASYG positions).

--Barcelona will host the newly created secretariat, whose main function will be to supervise the UPM's work and house its professional staff developing and supervising project implementation. A separate joint permanent committee will take up residence in Brussels to support the UPM's co-presidency.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The contentious issue of the northern (EU) co-presidency was vaguely handled in the declaration, with the EU determining how it would be handled in conformity with the EU's handling of its own presidency. Kouchner announced that the Czech Republic had agreed to France continuing to figure in the UPM co-presidency in a tandem arrangement after the Czech's become EU president in January 2009. When asked

what would happen under the succeeding Swedish EU presidency, Kouchner replied that the EU would examine the matter then, assuming the Lisbon Treaty had not been adopted in the meantime. Observers noted that Sweden refused to give the French ironclad assurances about a continuing French role during its EU presidency and would only consent to review the situation later. Another contentious and unresolved issue was the nomination of a UPM secretary general, intended for a state on the Mediterranean littoral. We understand that Tunisia, in a major sulk over losing the fight to host the secretariat, was refusing to agree to any further participation in the UPM. North African journalists covering the ministerial attributed this pique to Tunisian President Ben Ali's anger over the perceived slight to Tunisian prestige. Kouchner told reporters after the press conference that the UPM was leaving the position vacant in the hope that Tunisia would reconsider and put forth a candidate, which he indicated would receive French support. Interestingly, Kouchner voiced the hope that one day that an Israeli could one day be appointed to this position.

13. (U) Much of the declaration dealt with the UPM's work program (reducing pollution in the Mediterranean, maritime/land highways, civil protection, alternative energies like solar, higher education and research, and business development) and priority areas (political/security dialogue, maritime safety, economic and financial partnership in several functional areas, and social/human/cultural cooperation) for the next year. An introductory political statement reaffirmed commitment to "a just, comprehensive, and lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict consistent with ... the Madrid Conference ... principles, including

PARIS 00002023 002 OF 002

land-for-peace and based on relevant UNSC resolutions and the Roadmap." In a gesture to the Arabs, it stressed "the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative." The document, however, underscored that the UPM was "not intended to replace the other initiatives ... but contribute to their success." In this vein, the ministers welcomed the EU's "positive role" in the Middle East peace process via the Quartet framework and its support for the Annapolis process in pursuit of a solution based on a two-state solution. At likely French insistence, the declaration further supported indirect Syrian/Israeli talks and welcomed the establishment of diplomatic relations between Syria and Lebanon.

14. (C) Comment: As a UK colleague observed, the UPM ministerial was a success by not being a clear-cut failure. Nevertheless, Kouchner's not always deft handling of the contentious issues in the plenary session (the stress of which was evident in his at times brusque demeanor during the final press conference) and resentment by several Arab delegations of the manner in which agreements worked out with the Egyptians were presented to the others as fait accompli made the proceedings something of a cliffhanger. Algerian resentment was said to have been especially high, particularly when Israel got one of the scarce ASYG positions (Kouchner publicly pronounced the appointment of Israeli and Palestinian ASYGs an elegant outcome). The British, likely reflecting the views of other northern EU members, were relieved the ministerial did not involve any further financial commitments beyond the pre-existing Barcelona process. The Turks, however, are likely nursing the hardest feelings, suggesting the negotiation of terms for a sixth ASYG position could be key to their further participation. We note that Sarkozy special adviser and "eminence grise" for the Mediterranean Union, Henri Guaino, suddenly appeared at the press conference to answer reporters' questions and remind people that the Elysee was closely tracking the ministerial's outcome.

STAPLETON